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THE NATURAL AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN CHRIST.[1]

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THE question which we have to discuss may be regarded either as one in philosophy and criticism, or as one in religion and history. If the first alternative be taken, then we are at once confronted with the problem as to the existence of the supernatural, or as to the possibility and the credibility of miracles, and are required to determine whether and in what sense they could have happened; how far and under what conditions they can be believed. This is a perfectly legitimate subject for discussion, though perhaps not so urgent today as it was a generation ago; and as it is less urgent I may the more reasonably ask leave to be allowed to assume that miracles are both possible and credible. That after all is not such a very large assumption to ask to be allowed to make. The late Professor Huxley conceded the possibility; he denied the credibility. Yet the two questions are most intimately related, and their common root is in our view of the universe or the collective order of things. If that view excludes God, there can be nothing miraculous, no supernatural, only a rigorous naturalism; but if our view includes God, then the most stupendous of all possible miracles is conceded. For to say, God is, is also to say, he has created, and it means that nature as it exists to the senses is not the whole of being, but that before it lived and above it lives the Perfect Reason and the Almighty Will through whose action and by whose power nature was and is. The late Matthew Arnold used to say, in his sharp and oracular way, things that were

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sharper than profound and more brilliant than true. And one of these was his famous axiom: "The unfortunate thing about miracles is that they do not happen." But the remarkable thing is, miracles have happened. This wonderful world, beautiful in all its parts, is now, but once was not, and beside the fact of its creation or coming into existence, every later event that could be termed miraculous must seem small. The mind we call Man once was not, but now is; and from however mean a beginning, or in however low a form, mind may have begun to be, it is, when compared with all prior and lower forms of existence, a thing so wonderful as to be entitled to have its origin named miraculous. If, then, we believe that God is and that creation has been, the question as to the supernatural is at once decided. Where he is the very medium in and through which all things have their being, there is something which transcends the nature of naturalism, and this something can only be described as spirit.

But we may leave aside for the present these large philosophical and critical questions—the one touching the possibility, the other touching the credibility of the miracles—and try to look at the whole subject as a matter of religion and history. By that I mean that it is a question that concerns the greatest religious personality which history makes known to us. I ask, then, is it possible to approach the question of the supernatural through the person of Christ instead of through the idea of nature? In other words, our problem is, whether Christ's person may not become more concrete, real and credible by his miracles, and whether these miracles may not be made more historical and actual by being viewed through his person? The two—the person and the miracles—looked at in their intimate inner and reciprocal relations and in their significance for each other, is, then, the theme of this address.

I.

The supernatural viewed through personality is one thing, and the supernatural viewed through nature another and a very different. These are two opposite points of view, though also complementary when placed in their proper sequence and

relation. Nature is the realm of necessity; personality of freedom. The note of the one is uniformity; the note of the other is reason and will. In nature, what is termed causation reigns; but personality is itself a cause. It follows that there is a great contrast between nature read through man and man read through nature. In one sense the latter is a thing often attempted, but a thing that never has been and never can be achieved. Nature, taken as the method and measure for the interpretation of man, means that he is, through the necessity that is thought to reign everywhere, to be construed as part of a universe which knows antecedence and sequence but no rational causation, a universe of coördinated but not connected being. Man in such a system appears as a succession of dissimilar or similar phenomena but never as a concrete, coherent, continuous, self-identical person. His thoughts, his feelings and his actions are regulated by laws as absolute as those that determine the ebb and flow of the tides, the moulding of the tear or the dewdrop, the movements of the planets or of the stars. But change the point of view; look at nature through personality, which is really the only way in which you can ever reach it or get to know it, and then see how all is changed. The categories in which you interpret it are those of spirit, of thought; the terms in which you seek to explain its existence become intellectual and ethical, *i. e.*, they take a complexion from the medium you consciously employ, though there is no other medium you can possibly use. For it is impossible for man to reason concerning things in nature unless he starts with mind, or with ideas and forms mind supplies. There is no one single idea on which science prides itself which we could receive from nature alone. Take in illustration the famous argument against miracles formulated by Hume. Remember this: Hume was a pure skeptic because a purely empirical philosopher, *i. e.*, one who regards man as a product of the nature around him. He was to Hume made up of two things: (*a*) Impressions, which are sensations due to the direct action of nature through sense, and (*b*) ideas, which are remembered impressions, *i. e.*, their faint image or echo. He argues that you can never find yourself without an impression or an idea; that

you are, therefore, nothing but a series of impressions and ideas; that other than this you never are and more than these you can never know. It follows, then, that as you can never have an impression of cause, you can have no idea of any such thing. Nor can you have any impression or any consequent idea of so vast a thing as space, or of so multitudinous a thing as time. The ideas of self, causation, space, time are all unrealities, begotten of the tendency to feign, *i. e.*, they are mere fictions of the phantasy. All that comes to man, coming to him from without, must be given in individual impressions, and can only legitimately remain as the echo of these in single or associated ideas.

Now let us take this method and apply it to the ideas or beliefs which underlie Hume's famous argument against miracles. Miracles, he says, have two things against them: they are impossible, for they imply a violation of the order or the laws of nature, and they are incredible because they contradict our human experience. Well, let us subject the first argument to Hume's own method of criticism. We begin with the idea of nature. Where did we get it? and what does it mean? Had any man ever an impression of nature? How could he? He may have an impression of single things, say, of cold, of heat, of taste, of smell, of light, of sound. But of nature as a connected and coherent whole, it is impossible that any man can have an impression, and therefore of nature he can have no idea. How then can you say nature is? Still more, how can you tell what nature is, if no man ever had a direct impression of nature? Why, nature means an immense number of things. The total infinite multitude of impressions which make up the world without us, and the whole army of associated ideas within which we mistake for ourselves, but which is only a stream, or series, or succession of units in perpetual flow, moving and changing with inconceivable rapidity, and these as all bound into a system by some principle not understood. There can be no such thing, therefore, as an idea of nature, for of nature we can have no impression. Hence, all reasoning based upon it is illicit. Take next the idea of order: can we have any idea of it? Here difficulties of another kind meet

us: for order implies time and its sequences. And so to have a notion of order we must be ourselves continuous, but we are on Hume's premises only a series of ideas and impressions, with no existence save such as they can give. If, then, we are to receive an impression of order we must have the whole infinite series summed up in one single sensation, which would imply a sensory as vast as the universe. As the thing is so manifestly impossible we can have no conception of order, and, therefore, cannot reason as if we had. Again, take violation; how can we have a conception of violated order if we have no notion of the order said to be violated any more than we can have any conception of nature or self, when both nature and self have been dissolved? Therefore, to argue that miracles are a violation of nature is to assume a multitude of ideas which science never gave, which psychology can by no physiological process discover, and which man could never have unless he first gave them to nature. The result is that Hume's argument is so fundamentally antagonistic to his own first principles in philosophy as to be broken, split, and forever ended by the very criticism he himself brought to bear upon personal identity, upon causation, upon space, upon time, upon the very ideas on which his argument against miracles rests, and which gave to it all its apparent validity.

This means then that the interpretation of nature must begin with personality, not the interpretation of personality with nature. And this again further means that if nature is to be understood, we must place it in relation to the mind to which it is and through which it is, and from which no art or science of man can ever divorce it. But the nature which has no existence save to mind expresses mind, and the mind which caused can never be separated from the effect. For my part I forever object to nature being conceived as independent of God, or to God being conceived as outside nature. He is omnipresent and cannot but be everywhere. How then can he be outside anything? He is permanent in his activity; acted from eternity; acts still; how then can he ever be conceived as idle or inoperative? I utterly refuse to represent the action of God in nature as intervention. I will not have it defined as interference. The

very notion of his universal presence and power makes his efficiency the condition of knowledge, the very idea of his ubiquity involves his activity in the entire realm and sphere of nature. As nature is read through finite personality and by it explained, so nature is positively created through infinite personality and by it caused; and in all its operations and in all its parts he is the supreme factor, the ever-living cause of all that is and proceeds. God is universal, the infinite operative personality; who never intervenes or interferes, but ever acts. Nature cannot be without him; and he can never be put outside it.

II.

But now, if these two principles, the one negative and critical, viz., that you cannot through any mere empirical philosophy of sense get the ideas that constitute the nature known to science; the other positive and determinative, viz., that you can never dissociate God, the infinite personality, from the nature he produced, be assumed by me and granted by you,—for they have not been here discussed,—we shall then pass in the light of them as just stated to deal with the personality of Christ. And here our positive principle may be stated thus: The personality is the interpretation of his history and of his action in history. DeQuincey made an important distinction between the miracles essential to the gospel and those accidental or incidental. The essential miracles were those that centered in the person of Christ, viz., the incarnation and the resurrection. The incidental miracles were those that came in, as it were, by the way, as the natural and appropriate expression of the essential. Hence, we may add, if we find the essential, the incidental will become credible. What is natural in me, obedience to the order of nature, becomes supernatural in him. What is, as the fit or proper expression of his personality, natural in him, *i. e.*, the exercise of supernatural power, will then seem supernatural to me, whose personality lives within the terms of the natural. The normal act of the person miraculous by nature is the miracle.

If this then be our point of view, how shall we proceed to its discussion? The simplest method will be to start from the oppo-

site point, and see what would follow if we regard Christ as a strictly common and natural man. How, then, does science interpreting the common and natural man proceed? If he be great, it seeks to find out the conditions that gave him birth, through which he was and by which he is to be explained. What then were the conditions in the case of Christ? First, race is determinative and vital. He is a Jew. And what is a Jew? He was then narrow, sectional, exclusive, conceiving himself not so much as God's vassal as the possessor of God. God was, as it were, owned by him and granted to the world on terms which he defined. To be exclusive through religion is ever to be governed by a narrower and more expulsive spirit than even the spirit of nationality. And such was the Jew, and Jesus was a Jew by race. What was he as to time? It was a time of decadence and of alien oppression, when the priest had lost his ascendency and had become a mere negotiator between the turbulent Jewish people, on the one side, and, on the other, the jealousy of imperial Cæsar and his still more jealous procurator. It was, too, a time of formalism when the rabbi made rigid and elaborately maintained the rule of the letter. It was a time when the prophetic spirit had died out and all the world was looked at on the one side from the standpoint of sacerdotalism, on the other from that of ceremonialism. As to family — he was poor. Was his family not known, and was he not described as the son of Joseph the carpenter? What knowledge had he? Did they not ask, "How knoweth this man letters? His father we know and his mother we know, and we know that he has never learned letters." Without letters, what contact could he have with the wider world? The philosophy of Greece he knew not. Search his words and there is no trace of any knowledge of it. The polity and power of Rome came not within his experience; in a word, all that is signified by the civilized world or the culture of the peoples lay outside his range. As to the length of his life, what was it? Brief, nay, his is the very briefest public life of any serious consequence on record. At the longest possible estimate it was barely three years. And what was the prior preparation for it? Life in the carpenter's shop;

toil, pursued without making him sordid, or without creating the feeling of shame for poverty. And where was it lived? In a mean town, despised even in narrow Judea as lying outside the circle of religion and light. What kind of living human material had he to use? What was esteemed the very poorest. No priest was his friend. The Pharisee regarded him as only a kind of upstart, a sort of hot-headed fanatic who needed but to be questioned to be ended; one only fit to be snared in a catchy argument. The men who gathered around him were poor, unlettered, even as himself. They came from the fisherman's cot; they came from the receipt of custom. They came without pride of blood or culture or office; they were, one and all, in the scornful opinion of men who were judges in Israel, sorry men, yet entirely proper companions for their Master.

Such, then, were his outer conditions. Now what ought he to have been? Even such as they were. But what was he? Can we try him by the standard appropriate to a creature of such conditions? Let us make an attempt or two. Take first his speech. Speech expresses thought. In the region of intellect it belongs, as it were, to the very essence and spirit of the man. In it he lives, as it were, incarnate. But his speech, what was its order? It was simple, excessively simple in outward meaning, but profound, vast, infinite in inner content. Had it eloquence? Nay, it is in form broken, familiar, colloquial; the speech of daily life. Was it carefully preserved? Nay. He is never said to have written save once when to hide his offended modesty he stooped to write upon the sand. On paper or parchment he wrote no word, nor do we know that he ordered any word to be written. He spoke what he had to say into the listening air; and the air, as it were, stood still and received and heard his speech, preserved it and let it fall into the hearts and upon the pages where it is recorded for all time. In quantity, how great is it? The quantity is so small that selected from their context of history and event all his words may be read in an hour or at most two. They may be written on a few pages and carried in the smallest pocket. Yet take the words he has spoken, as to their intrinsic worth and power, and

where will you find their fellow? They have lived for centuries and in every century in which they have lived, they have been like the very presence of God, as it were the quick and quickening speech by which he created the worlds. They have taken men, often the ignorant and the base, and made them saints and holy. They have entered depraved and brutal nations, and have built them up into honor and wisdom, into order and enlightenment. They have no peers amid all the words ever spoken by men. Vital, living, breathing the very quickening breath which God breathes into man that he may become a living soul, they continue to live and to behave as if they were the corporate personality of the speaker, incarnating for all men in all time the spirit of his mind. For they live wherever they go, and in every life they enter they create a responsive Christ-like spirit within the souls of men.

But let us take, secondly, his moral action; his will as expressed in conduct; his being as realized character. Character is a subtle note distinctive of the inmost man. Now one thing marks universal character, a sense of sin, a consciousness of defect, and the higher the man the more is he marked by this consciousness. The great saints of the world have been the men most conscious of defect. The feeling of sin has so entered into the soul of man as to be, as it were, the hunger for God in him, driving him to the God for whom he hungers. But now here is the remarkable thing. Christ is not conscious of sin. He does not know it, he never confesses it; and what is even more extraordinary, his own want of consciousness is reflected in the judgment of the enemies who surround him. They do not see sin in him, and are silent in the face of his challenge to convince him if they can. Here now enters another element. If his words can only be described as a kind of intellectual miracle, what shall we describe his character as being? Is it not as character transcendent? It rises above the normal, the ordinary, the common. What name shall we give to it but the name of a miraculous character, having no fellow in the entire race of man? For this character shows its power by forming character. Can you give me one single instance in the whole history of the race that

may be precisely matched with Christ, where the character becomes a sort of norm or law, a standard which through the most distant times and amid the most dissimilar races men feel they ought to measure themselves by, containing the qualities they ought most zealously to imitate? Goethe, surveying the ages, said there was one thing we could never transcend—the moral loveliness exhibited in the gospel. We might imitate it but we could not surpass it. What is it that amid a critical, jealous, envious race makes the character so transcendent? Think of the imperial Roman with the conqueror's contempt for the men he conquered, bending in reverent homage before the very Jew his own procurator had crucified. Think of the proud intellectual Greek with the scorn of the cultured for the uncultivated and the barbarous, acknowledging the perfect sweetness and unsullied light of this Jew from Nazareth. Think of the man with the merchant's vanity and calculating instincts, pregnant with dollars and believing without irony and with the simplicity of a faith which feels that it cannot be questioned in their almightiness, face to face with this moneyless peasant and carpenter, forced to feel that of all things that have arisen in time, the sublimest is his character, the moral majesty embodied in his divine humility. Do you not think there are marvels here as inexplicable on natural grounds as any miracle?

But take a third case. His social idea. Social schemes, real and Utopian, had fermented in the world before him as they are fermenting in the world today. States have been built by many and great men, but mark the extraordinary peculiarity of Christ's idea. It was a kingdom of God. It was a kingdom composed of men. It was a kingdom which left every man in the political society where he stood, but changed the man and by changing him changed the society. It was an idea of wonderful originality, a kingdom of heaven as distinguished from all the kingdoms of the earth, of God as distinguished from all the kingdoms of evil. It was a kingdom within men. It was a kingdom around men. It was a kingdom in which men lived. It was a kingdom constituted of little children. It was a wonderful kingdom, ethical, spiritual

through and through, where every man loved God supremely and his neighbor as himself; where every man was the brother of all the rest and did to him as became a brother and as a brother alone. The marvelous thing is that he did not simply formulate this idea, but proceeded at once to realize it. And could you conceive what must have seemed a more prosaic attempt at realization? Fancy had you confided it to Alexander or to Plato, to Cæsar or Augustus, how would they have proceeded? Or, had you with your modern genius as builders of great cities undertaken it, how would you have gone to work? The warriors and statesmen would have followed the old methods of violence and craft, using force by preference, and craft only when force failed, building authority on wrong and creating order by means of lawlessness, with the certain result that the authority would endure only so long as the force was irresistible and the order live no longer than the repressive strength of the imperial hand continued unimpaired. And the philosopher would have dreamed out a system fit only for the schools, which might have had there a perennial being as an ideal, but never could have anywhere, or in any state have achieved reality. And you with your modern faith in the might of gold and the still greater might of the greed for gold, would have given it lavishly and summoned men from the ends of the earth to join the new community which promised best for the next world by making the most of this. But Christ went to work in a way which looks in contrast one of almost grotesque simplicity. He walked round the sea of Galilee, found and called Peter, Andrew and John; passed the receipt of custom and called Matthew; met Paul on the way to Damascus, and called him, and out of these men whom the statesmen of today would have classed with the residuum, or men of culture have described as the dregs of society — for they were men who were by their own day and people despised as publicans and avoided as sinners — Christ made his society. And what in his hands did they become? He changed Peter, the fisherman, into the man who founded churches and gave his name as saint and patron to the proudest of historical societies. And John he

made into the writer of the greatest history that ever came from the pen of man. And Paul he made into the great apostle and missionary, father of the Gentile churches and author of epistles whose spirit and speech are almost as quickening as the words of the master himself. These he took and out of them made the men we know, but his power was not exhausted when they were enlisted and disciplined for service. Nay, it continued, became, as it were, a permanent, moral energy, indestructible yet ever convertible, which embodied itself first in these apostolic men, but did not pass with their passing, but age by age, generation by generation, re-incorporated itself in new men and new institutions, behaving as becomes a power almighty, invincible, capable of creating the kingdom Christ founded, of realizing the idea he proclaimed.

III.

Now take this Christ and attempt to explain him by his historical conditions and circumstances. Where do you find in these conditions and circumstances any cause or factor capable of appearing even as an endeavour at a show of an explanation? Take his intellectual creations, his moral character, and his social idea, all as tested and elucidated by his action and function in history, and then ask where in his society, in his time, in his place, in his people, in a word, in his whole environment, have you factors to account for the total result? Before him there had lived prophets of a sublime monotheism, priests of an elaborate worship, around him lived rabbis of varied schools, leaders of many sects, but what man with the winsomeness of character, the universalism of mind and aim, the transcendance of idea and motive you find in him? Before he can be held the child of his age, the age must be proved capable of being his father, but the remarkable thing is the degree in which the effect transcends in all the elements of personality all the qualities that can be discovered in the cause. What is necessary is to explain how the Supreme Person of history comes out of meanest conditions, yet how can a mean and narrow environment be the factor of universal supremacy? Let us reverse the position and look at a man of perennial achievement both in thought and in religion

who may be explained by his conditions, Plato. He is a man of supreme literary genius giving the highest philosophical speculation in a form impressive to the imagination of all cultivated men, whatever their race or age. He is a man of purest religious genius, penetrated through and through with a passion to create the holy, with a desire to achieve the good. He is a man with a great social idea, the wish to build up in Greece, but for all time, a republic, which shall yet be a society governed by divine laws, imitated from the divine. He is the superlative genius in philosophy of his people, and they were of all peoples the foremost in speculative power, and his age was their golden age in philosophical and literary achievement. Before him there had lived many philosophers, everyone of whom contributed elements to his thought, and these he preserves and glorifies. Before him poets had lived, the classical poets of all time—epic, lyric, tragic—giving, in poems so perfect as to be immortal, expression to the multitudinous emotions and aspirations of the men of Greece. Before him Greek art had made actual the ideal of beauty, shaping with plastic hand out of cold and dark marble a form so divine that men felt as they looked upon Pheidias' head of Zeus,—Lo! we have beheld God face to face. Before him there had happened those great political events that had fused the scattered and independent Greek cities into a single united Greek people, and had made them conscious of a mission far beyond their own borders. And in his own Attic land the splendid genius of Pericles had made Athens illustrious forever, and created the most brilliant society the world has ever known. Conceive, then, this society as it stood, imaginative, literary, æsthetic, religious, which was as it were the mother from whose fruitful breast the young Plato sucked the milk of culture. Here was an environment which could educate; yet even with it he was not content. He wandered through Greece and forth into larger realms, into more ancient countries, stood face to face with their wisdom, the wisdom of Egypt and the further Orient. And he came back to Athens, drew around him a band of distinguished disciples, who gave almost as much as they received, and while he was the quickening center, they were a sensitive and stimula-

tive circumference. And in their creative fellowship, breathing the crystal air and feeling the high inspiration of his own famed city, he lived a long, happy and productive life, reaching a ripe and honored age. And what did he accomplish? Great things, nay, the very greatest possible in philosophy, yet in philosophy that is, as it were, the clarified spirit of religion. This he bequeathed in books, in dialogues, which have so enriched the literature of the world that it has never allowed them to die, but has treasured them for their truth, admired them for their beauty and imitated their form. And so this man may be said to have created a philosophy which has helped to civilize man, and a literature which the world, so long as civilized will neither forget nor ignore.

Yet compare the man of whom all these high and proud things can be said with this Jesus who issues untaught, unfamed, from obscure Nazareth into a world narrow, limited, and through it to the throne of intellectual and moral supremacy over man. Compare them, or rather, contrast them; for how can the two be placed in comparison, when in every respect,—birth, rank, education,—Plato is a splendid contrast to Jesus, while in historical function and achievement Jesus is a still more splendid contrast to Plato. Now let me put this question to you: Suppose on the day of Christ's death you had asked Pilate, or later had inquired of the orators of Greece, or of the philosophers of Athens,—do you think there is any similarity between Socrates who drank the hemlock, or Plato, who speculated concerning the ideal truth and society, and this Jesus? How do you think your inquiry would have been met? Can you imagine the scorn, the dazed wonder with which your question would have been received? Nay, could it ever have formed itself in any human soul, especially if souls were then as they are today? Yet now, when eighteen centuries have had time to consider and deliver judgment, what is their verdict? That this Plato with everything in his favor that time could give, is good for scholars and great in literature; but that this Christ is supreme in history, necessary to its order and so needful to man as to be

the very star of his hope, and the very light divine amid the darkness of his mortal being.

IV.

So far then we have been dealing with Christ in relation to his time and through it. And we have seen the miraculous contrast between him and his circumstances, between the actual condition in which he appeared and lived and the actual deeds which he has performed. And before I come to what seems to me, the inevitable deduction, I wish you to observe some of the features which he bears in the evangelical histories. The evangelists describe him in twofold terms, terms that are entirely natural, and terms as distinctly supernatural. He appears as the child of Joseph and Mary, humble inhabitants of Nazareth, as growing in wisdom, in grace, in stature, in favor with God and with man. He is represented as hungry, as thirsty, as suffering, as dying, as dead. But he appears also in an entirely different character, as a great worker of wonders, a doer of mighty deeds, and after the death of the cross, he appears again as one who arose from the dead. Now we have to mark this: There is a remarkable sobriety in the miracles that are ascribed to him. There is a wonderful sanity in them. It is more remarkable because in this region imagination when allowed to work freely never works sanely. What kind of miracles does he do? He creates joy at a wedding by ministering to innocent pleasure. He heals the blind, the halt, the lame, the sick of the palsy; he brings comfort to the widow who has lost a son, to the Gentile nobleman who mourns a child; he creates joy in the heart of the woman who had sought counsel of many physicians and only grew the worse for all their healing. He goes through life like a kind of organized beneficence, creating health and happiness. Now take the religious miracles of the ordinary type and you will find them to be in all their most characteristic features the exact reverse. They reflect a morbid temper, a fantastic and even childish imagination, such a temper as made a late distinguished Oxford scholar, whose biography is in process of appearing, turn the common blessings of life, like the water he drank and the food he ate, into means of penance and ministers of melancholy.

Or take the extravagant miraculous legends of the Middle Ages or of Buddhism as typical of the fantasy which creates and delights in the marvelous and the supernatural. Thus there is the tale of the culprit about to be hanged, who prays to the virgin, and when the rope is around his neck she comes and so holds him up that the rope has no chance of effecting its purpose. If we contrast this characteristic insanity of the common religious miracle, with the remarkable sanity that distinguishes all the miracles of Christ, we can hardly fail to feel the difference between the sobriety of history and the topsy-turvydom of dreams.

But here another point emerges, the extraordinary discrimination which the evangelists made between what we may term the personal and the altruistic acts of Christ. They represent all his miracles as worked for others, never as for himself. There is not one single self-regarding miracle attributed to him. That is not what one would *a priori* have expected, for it is not what we have been accustomed to find in mythical narratives. But let us observe how intrinsic the matter is to our gospel histories. There is the temptation, which we may assume represents a fact. For the mind of the Messiah must have passed through a great intellectual crisis or conflict of ideals when the consciousness of his mission first became clear and imperative within him. Now what was the first temptation? "Make these stones bread." What did it mean? "Do for yourself what you have power to do for others. It cannot be wrong to do for yourself, the greater person, what it is right to do for the infirm, who are the less important. You are to feed the hungry. Feed yourself. Use your miraculous power for your own ends and good." But why does he regard this as a temptation and how does he meet it? "Man," he says, "does not live by bread alone." If he had performed this miracle for himself, it would have signified that he took himself out of the category of manhood; that he surrendered the act of sacrifice. It would have meant that that great act was not of obedience, but purely an act of personal power. So the temptation is rejected, and he says man shall not live by bread alone. Now take the second temptation: "Cast thyself down from this pinna-

cle of the temple, for it is written, he shall give his angels charge over thee." What did that mean? Exactly the opposite. "Treat yourself as so much an object of care to God that if you throw yourself down from here, God will intervene, act as he acts in no other cases, and miraculously save you." And what is his answer? "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." And why such an answer? If he had dealt with himself in his own case as a special object of care for God, here again isolation from man would have been evident; manhood would have been surrendered, and he would have ceased to be our brother, made in all things like unto his brethren. Yet so deep is the belief in the hearts of men that miraculous power where it exists is power, meant expressly for one's own purpose and one's own person, that the very ideas and suggestions present in the temptation reappear in the mockery which affronts the tragedy of the cross. Thus: "He saved others, himself he cannot save." They hold that as he does not save himself he cannot be possessed of divine power. Or they say, "Come down from the cross and save thyself and us,' which is just the tempter's first suggestion in another form. Or, "He trusted in God, let him see if God will have him," which is only a revised and adapted version of the second temptation. The very same idea underlies these several sayings, and it is this: If he has supernatural power he will use it in his own behalf and for his own ends. This was man's idea, but it does not represent Christ's mind or will. In his whole life and in all his actions he never exercised his miraculous power for himself; always and only for men. Now mark, this is something entirely different from what the religious legends which embody popular expectations and beliefs express and reveal. For example, when Mohammed fleeing from Mecca was hotly pursued by his foes, he is represented as taking refuge in a cavern, and as soon as he has entered a spider comes and weaves its web over the mouth of the cave. When the pursuers come they see the spider's web and say, "He cannot have entered here, for this web could not be so quickly woven" and so they ride on. It is a rule then that men who write the histories of religious persons whom they credit with miraculous power, give them the power in the first instance

for their own behalf, and only as a second and later purpose on behalf of man. But Christ, from first to last, in all his acts and in all his doings, disclaims and refuses to exercise miraculous power for himself. In his mind it is man's, not his own; to be used always and only in the service of those who need and who suffer, never for personal interests or aims.

V.

But there is another point of view from which this power must be viewed: in its bearing on his moral character and his moral relations to men. Have you ever considered what a tremendous gift miraculous power would be. What a tax it would be upon moral restraint and all the qualities men must see and believe in that they may trust! Consider how a man is affected by power which other men may not challenge and are unable to resist. It tends to brutalize to de-humanize, to make the man lower in moral tone and character than his fellows. Indeed, there is nothing that depraves like the possession of absolute power. Two ends of society are the points at which you find the deepest and worst crime: Up at the very top, down at the very bottom. Two things are calamities; being so high exalted as to be above criticism, being so far depressed as to be below it. Be thankful that there is criticism around you; the keener the better. Man needs it. He can best bear it who is the best man. For unless associated with a goodness truly divine, absolute power can only deprave. What an awful record is the record, for example, of the imperial court of Russia. What a record of sin, of crime, of the beastliest vice. Despotism is hard on the victims who are below it, but hardest on the victim who is above, the despot himself. And if you enlarge the principle and imagine a being possessed of miraculous power alive in the world, you will at once perceive what a moral tax such a possession involves; to be able to heal man, to smite men, to have a knowledge which makes them seem transparent globes whose inner secrets the tongue may falsify but cannot reveal, to have hidden energies which can be used for personal advantage or neighborly despite,—what a nature of absolute godliness is

needed in order to guide and in order to control such an awful and ominous power. Were Satan for one moment to ascend the throne of the Almighty, would not, in that moment, the work of all eternity be undone? Satan transformed for one hour into God would mean that the universe were a universe no more. But here is Christ with this marvelous power, and he is never corrupted by its use. Men believe that he possesses it, and they see him exercise it, but they never distrust him, never suspect him or feel that his presence or his purpose is other than beneficent. It does not divide him from men; rather they are turned the more to him; they presume the more upon him that they believe him to be supernatural. Consider this remarkable fact: His enemies do not deny his miracles, but go to him and say, "Thou doest these things by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils." And what does this mean? They confess that he did the things, but ascribe them to devilish power. Now if they had believed that the power in him was the devil's would they not have spoken him softly and called him the gentlest names they knew? Would they not have flattered him until they got out of his reach, saying to him "kindly devil," while all the time they thought him a devilish devil. And if these men dared to come into the presence of Christ, acknowledging his power, and yet saying, it is by Beelzebub, did they not thus pay the greatest tribute they could give to his purity, to his divine gentleness, to his sovereign control over himself? Such they seem to think is the marvelous strength of the grace he impersonates; that they can even dare to presume upon it and name him what they know he is not, and cannot possibly be.

Here, then, we have a unique miracle of the moral kind, power absolute, that does not deprave. While the power is so absolute, still the grace is greater; for the men who have acknowledged the power venture to presume upon the moral control of the character. But this is not all: We have next to look at some literary questions which are here involved. The evangelists became his historians, and in their histories they perform this remarkable feat, they wed the person they believe supernatural to an actual world, they describe the

life he actually lived. Now, I am speaking to people who live in a literary age; to men who know the conditions of literary work. Let me set you then a problem: Suppose you had to represent the career of a person possessed of the miraculous power attributed to Christ, in what terms would you write his history? Suppose you were told he is a person who had power to heal the sick, cure the blind, and even raise the dead; how would you proceed in representing him? Or take another case: Suppose you had set as the text the eighteen verses of the first chapter of John, "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and was God." "And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us." "No man hath seen God at any time, but the only begotten Son, who is the bosom of the Father; he hath declared him." This then is your text, and you are required to write a history as a sermon to this text. What kind of deeds would you give him; what kind of character would you ascribe to him? What sort of words would you put into his mouth? You would not dare to make him feeble and weak and suffering and dying. No, you would have to keep him as remote as possible from commonplace humanity. You would feel bound to represent everything on a gigantic scale; stupendous, abnormal, unnatural, not merely supernatural. But look what the gospels do; you step from the highest speculation to the simplest history. Christ walking by the sea and calling his disciples. Christ going to the wedding; Christ meeting Nicodemus—Nicodemus coming by night, coming, in deference to his conscience, coming by night, in deference to the Jews. Jesus, not standing on his dignity, but receiving the man who comes in the darkness, yet speaking to him as if all mankind stood in that one man before him. Look at him again with the woman of Samaria, tired and thirsty, asking water to drink; speaking to her, not as if she were an outcast woman, but as if in her all mankind did live. How marvelous it is, the humanity, simple, common, everyday, yet the great background, never forgotten, never absent one moment from the evangelist's thought, and underneath all there is the great idea—man is the image of God, and so the fittest vehicle for the revelation of him whose image he is. We may say,

then, were the gospels inventions, whether mythical or designed, they were the most marvelous literary creations on record. They contradict all other mythologies, for they do not make the miracle a power for personal good. They contradict all literary art, for they found a common familiar history upon the most marvelous of all conceptions as to the person whose history it is. And under all the history lies that great sense of the supernatural. "He is the light of the world; he is the life of the world;" through its darkness he shines; by his death it is redeemed from mortality.

How, then, did they understand this person? There are two interpretations that are allowed to stand side by side in the gospels. There is a strict naturalism represented by Pilate, represented by Caiaphas, represented by the Romans and by the Jews. The naturalism is this: "Jesus of Nazareth is a troublesome person, a carpenter, the son of Joseph and Mary. Let us put him to death." The other view is the supernaturalism of the evangelists: "He is the Son of God; he is the Son of Man. He is the Word made flesh. He is the light of the world. He is the life of the world. He has been in the bosom of the Father. He has come forth to speak unto men." These two views stand side by side; but we can now bring them to the bar of history and ask, which is the truer? If you had lived then you would probably not have doubted one moment that the truth was with Pilate when he said, "I have power to crucify thee and I have power to release thee." But dare you now say that the truth is with Pilate? Whether is the natural or the supernatural the more reasonable and the more philosophical explanation of the facts of history? Was not the evangelical interpretation of his person a marvelous prophetic forecast which all history has tended to justify? This is the question which I leave to make its appeal to you as unto reasonable men. Which of these alternative explanations offers the best solution of the problem? The person must contain the sufficient reason for all the effects he has produced, and where the effects are so extraordinary can the person be less than divine?